

## The New York Times

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# *Mel Stottlemyre, Yankees' Ace During Lean Years, Dies at 77*

By **Richard Goldstein**

Jan. 14, 2019

Mel Stottlemyre, the Yankees' pitching ace in their lean years of the late 1960s and early '70s and later the longtime pitching coach for Mets and Yankees teams that won the World Series, died on Sunday in a Seattle hospital. He was 77.

His wife, Jean Stottlemyre, said the cause was complications of multiple myeloma, a type of blood cancer for which he had been treated for many years. At his death he also had the flu and pneumonia, she said. Stottlemyre, who grew up in Washington State, lived in the Seattle area.

Stottlemyre made his last visit to Yankee Stadium in June 2015, when the Yankees surprised him by dedicating a Monument Park plaque in his honor when he attended their annual Old-Timers' Day gathering. The tribute came after their former second baseman Willie Randolph received a plaque as scheduled.

Stottlemyre, walking with the aid of a cane, told the crowd, "It's been a thrill over the years for me to wear this uniform." He said that if it was to be his last Old-Timers' Day, he would "start another baseball club, coaching up there, whenever they need me."

Arriving at Yankee Stadium in August 1964, Stottlemyre posted a 9-3 record while helping the Yankees win a fifth straight pennant. He then faced Bob Gibson, the St. Louis Cardinals' future Hall of Fame pitcher, three times in the World Series.

The Yankees were beaten by the Cardinals in seven games, but Stottlemyre became an anchor of their pitching staff. In his 11 seasons with the Yankees, a long stretch of largely lean years after decades of dominance, he was one of their few bright spots. A right-hander featuring a superb sinkerball, he was a five-time All-Star and a three-time 20-game winner.



Stottlemyre after signing a contract with the Yankees in 1966. With him was General Manager Ralph Houk. “Here’s a 21-year-old kid nobody knew coming out of nowhere with this great arm and super control who has all the confidence — not a big head, mind you, but a quiet self-assurance — of a Whitey Ford,” his teammate Tom Tresh once said.

Allyn Baum/The New York Times

Stottlemyre coached the Mets’ pitchers for 10 seasons, including their 1986 World Series championship year, and the Yankees’ pitchers for another 10, during which he won four World Series championship rings. He was being treated for multiple myeloma, which affects plasma cells, for much of his time as the Yankees pitching coach.

Stottlemyre was the quiet type, but even as a rookie pitcher he possessed uncommon poise.

“Here’s a 21-year-old kid nobody knew coming out of nowhere with this great arm and super control who has all the confidence — not a big head, mind you, but a quiet self-assurance — of a Whitey Ford,” his teammate Tom Tresh was quoted as saying in the oral history “Bombers” (2002), by Richard Lally.

Years later, Stottlemyre was admired by the pitchers he coached for his optimism and his ability to relate to them. The Yankees’ David Cone once said that Stottlemyre anticipated how pitchers liked to be treated. Stottlemyre, in turn, said he had benefited from talking with his sons Todd and Mel Jr., both of whom pitched in the major leagues. “It’s like he never got older,” Cone said of Stottlemyre.

“When you’re struggling, he’s always there for you,” the relief pitcher Mariano Rivera told the New Jersey newspaper The Record in October 1998, after the Yankees defeated the San Diego Padres to begin their string of three straight World Series titles.

Dwight Gooden remembered how Stottlemyre came to the mound and steadied him when he was two outs away from a no-hitter against the Seattle Mariners at Yankee Stadium in May 1996. Gooden had walked two batters and thrown a wild pitch to Jay Buhner, putting runners on second and third with the Yankees leading by 2-0.

“There’s something about his demeanor — so trusting, so trustworthy — that makes you want to tell him the truth,” Gooden said in his memoir, “Heat” (1999), written with Bob Klapisch.

Gooden recalled Stottlemyre using his nickname while telling him: “I’m not taking you out, Doc. I’m just here to give you a breather. This game is yours, Doc. Yours unless you tell me you can’t go anymore.”

Stottlemyre in April 2000. He was the pitching coach for the Yankees teams that won the World Series in 1996, 1998, 1999 and 2000. Barton Silverman/The New York Times

When Gooden insisted that he still had it, Stottlemyre told him, "Go get him."

Gooden struck out Buhner and got Paul Sorrento to pop up to Derek Jeter, the shortstop. The no-hitter was his.

Stottlemyre's fellow coach Don Zimmer recalled that after Stottlemyre revealed he had multiple myeloma in April 2000, he remained strong and steady while coaching the Yankees' pitchers for most of the regular season, even as he received chemotherapy.

"He was a rock," Zimmer said in "Zim: A Baseball Life" (2001), written with Bill Madden.

After a stem-cell transplant in September 2000, Stottlemyre could not return to the Yankees that season, since he risked contracting an infection. When the Yankees beat the Mets in the World Series, Zimmer called Stottlemyre at his home.

"When Mel answered the phone, he sounded ecstatic," Zimmer remembered. "Later on that night, I found out that Mel's brother had died earlier in the day of a brain tumor. He never said a word about it on the phone because he didn't want to ruin the night for the rest of us. That's what kind of a person he is."

Melvin Leon Stottlemyre was born on Nov. 13, 1941, in Hazleton, Mo., and grew up in Mabton, Wash., the son of a construction worker. He was signed by the Yankee organization in 1961 out of what was then Yakima Valley Junior College (now Yakima Valley College) in Washington State.

When Stottlemyre joined the Yankees, Ford, the Hall of Fame left-hander, became his mentor. When Ford hurt his shoulder pitching in the 1964 World Series opener, the Yankees rested much of their hopes on Stottlemyre. He beat Gibson in Game 2, pitched to a no-decision in Game 5 and was the loser in Game 7.

The Yankees never returned to the World Series during Stottlemyre's playing career, but he became one of the American League's leading pitchers.

He had a 20-9 record in 1965, when he led the A.L. in complete games, with 18, and innings pitched, with 291. The Yankees were beginning to fade by then, finishing sixth in what was then a 10-team league. Stottlemyre won 12 games and lost 20 in 1966 when they finished last for the first time since 1912. But he rebounded to go 21-12 in 1968 and 20-14 in 1969.

In June 1974, while pitching against the California Angels, Stottlemyre tore his rotator cuff. Over the winter, he was advised by the Yankees to rest until at least May 1. When they released him at the end of spring training, he was stunned. The move was made by the team's general manager, Gabe Paul, but Stottlemyre was convinced that the Yankees owner George Steinbrenner had been behind it, and it left him embittered.

Stottlemyre retired with a record of 164-139 and an earned run average of 2.97 before turning to a second career as a pitching coach. But a family tragedy took him away from baseball for a time and ultimately colored his already bittersweet feelings toward Yankees management.

In March 1981, Stottlemyre's son Jason died of leukemia a few days after his 11th birthday. Stottlemyre left his post as a roving pitching instructor for the Mariners the next year to be with his family. Two decades later, reflecting on the possibility of a connection between his multiple myeloma and his son's leukemia, Stottlemyre thought back to radiation treatments he had received on his shoulder from the Yankees' team doctor in the late 1960s as a means of reducing calcification. A radiologist had advised him to stop the treatments because of potential health consequences, and he eventually did so despite what he said were reassurances from the Yankees' medical staff that the radiation would not harm him.

"I've become convinced it played a role in both of the diseases," Stottlemyre said of the radiation in his memoir, "Pride and Pinstripes" (2007), written with John Harper. "The medical care the Yankees provided was not up to the standards you'd expect in professional sports, and certainly not from one of the most successful sports franchises in history."

After a break from baseball, Stottlemyre became the Mets' pitching coach in 1984, Gooden's rookie season. He did not tinker with the mechanics of the immensely gifted Gooden, but counseled him on how to handle the spotlight and saw himself as something of a father figure.

When the Mets defeated the Boston Red Sox in the 1986 World Series, Stottlemyre oversaw an outstanding pitching staff featuring Gooden, Bob Ojeda, Sid Fernandez, Ron Darling, Roger McDowell and Jesse Orosco.

Stottlemyre at an Old-Timers' day ceremony at Yankee Stadium in 2013. At the same event two years later, the Yankees dedicated a Monument Park plaque in his honor.

Barton Silverman/The New York Times

Stottlemyre was fired at the end of the 1993 season and was the Houston Astros' pitching coach for two seasons before being asked by Steinbrenner to return to the Yankees. Stottlemyre had torn up invitations to the Yankees' Old-Timers' Days for two decades in anger over what he considered the bad faith the team showed by releasing him in 1975. But he decided to accept the offer, joining the staff of the new Yankees manager, Joe Torre, when he came to believe that Paul, the general manager, not Steinbrenner, had been responsible for letting him go.

The Yankees won the World Series in 1996, then captured consecutive championships from 1998 to 2000, the year Stottlemyre began treatments for multiple myeloma.

Stottlemyre guided pitching staffs that included Cone, Rivera, Andy Pettitte, Roger Clemens, Mike Mussina, David Wells and Gooden, who was coming back from battles with drug abuse. Stottlemyre left the Yankees after the 2005 season and was replaced by Ron Guidry, their former star left-hander.

Stottlemyre was the Mariners' pitching coach in 2008, but he was not retained when Don Wakamatsu replaced Jim Riggleman as manager the next season.

In addition to his wife, the former Jean Mitchell, he is survived by a brother, Jeff; a sister, Joyce Lawrence; his sons, Mel Jr. and Todd; and eight grandchildren. Todd Stottlemyre pitched for 14 seasons in the major leagues. Mel Jr., who pitched for one season, became the Miami Marlins' pitching coach in December 2018 and had formerly been in that post for the Arizona Diamondbacks and the Mariners.

By his last few seasons with the Yankees, Stottlemyre had cemented his reputation as an outstanding pitching coach. But his resentment of Steinbrenner resurfaced in the face of criticism from him when the team was unable to make it back to the World Series. Stottlemyre was also

irked by what he saw as undue interference from Billy Connors, the Yankees pitching adviser who worked out of the team's facilities in Tampa, Fla., and was close to Steinbrenner. (Connors died last June at 76.)

In an interview with USA Today in May 2005, Steinbrenner complained that Stottlemyre had not been improving the Yankees' pitching staff. But Torre was quick to defend Stottlemyre, who had been alongside him on four championship teams. On Monday, Torre, in a statement, called Stottlemyre "a role model to us all and the toughest man I have ever met."

**Correction:** Jan. 14, 2019

*Because of an editing error, an earlier version of this obituary misstated the year USA Today published an interview George Steinbrenner. It was 2005, not 2015.*

Daniel E. Slotnik contributed reporting.

A version of this article appears in print on Jan. 15, 2019, on Page B13 of the New York edition with the headline: Mel Stottlemyre, 77, Yankees' Ace and a Bright Spot in Dim Years, Dies